

'Jam dbyangs skyabs འཇམ་དབྱངས་སྐལ་བཟང་།

It was now lunchtime. Sgrol ma sat resting with her head against her back-basket in the yak enclosure about twenty steps from their yak-hair tent.

"Mother, I'm hungry!" Sgrol ma's only child complained. She was five-years-old.

"I'll soon finish collecting dung. Wait a bit," Sgrol ma said.

"I can't wait. I'm so hungry," Sgrol ma's daughter whimpered and started sobbing.

"Bitch! My daughter's hungry. What the fuck are you doing there?" Sgrol ma's husband shouted from where he lay in bed.

Sgrol ma rushed to the tent, put some tamarisk twigs in the yellow-soil hearth, added dry yak dung, and used a match to light the tamarisk. Not much smoke passed through the rusty stovepipe that was several years old. The tent soon filled with smoke.

"What the fuck are you doing?!" Sgrol ma's husband shouted while coughing.

Sgrol ma said nothing, just opened the tent flap and tried to fan the smoke out.

"Are you deaf?" Sgrol ma's husband demanded.

Sgrol ma did not reply, not knowing what to say. She poured boiled milk in a baby's bottle and used her unwashed left hand to give it to her daughter.

"Idiot! Did you break your right hand? What's wrong with your right hand? Nasty! You also didn't wash your hands. Is the river dry?" her husband bellowed.

Sgrol ma was accustomed to such abuse and kept quiet, further enraging her husband, who grabbed one of his shoes by the bed and threw it at her. Sgrol ma dodged it. Further enraged, her husband got

†Jam dbyangs skyabs. 2019. A New Life. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 58:423-424.

out of bed, picked up the shoe's mate and beat Sgrol ma - hard. There was nobody in the tent to stop him. It was not the first time.

Sgrol ma accepted these beatings as did many local women.

Despite the pain, Sgrol ma did not cry. Instead, she fantasized about all the days and years ahead, hoping for a long life. Sgrol ma imagined one day being a nun and felt ecstatic, hoping for that day with a new sense of eventual freedom.

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The next morning, Sgrol ma finished work. She was glad her husband had not beaten her.

Unbeknown to her, her husband had silently died in bed. His daughter rode his neck and demanded, "Wake up, Father! I'm hungry. My *me*¹ 'bottle' is empty," she complained.

There was no answer.

When she entered the tent and realized her husband was dead Sgrol ma sobbed, but then, a few minutes later, her heartbeat was fast, and she felt very warm. She grew joyful.

People try very hard to look as others think they should look, so Sgrol ma lamented very loudly because she knew her daughter was closely observing her. As she lamented, she recalled that her husband had slaughtered countless yaks and sheep.

Anyway, a new life awaited Sgrol ma.

TIBETAN TERMS

'jam dbyangs skyabs འཇམ་དབྱངས་སྐྱུང་སྔ་

me me མེ་མེ།

rwa nu རྩ་ལུ།

sgrol ma སྐྱོལ་མ།

¹ Young children refer to *rwa nu* as *me me* 'baby bottle'.